US Militias in 2025: A Comprehensive Analysis

I. Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of US militias in 2025, examining their definition, historical evolution, characteristics, types, geographical distribution, activity levels, key trends, the impact of political polarization, the influence of various ideologies, and the critical distinction between legal and private militia groups. Understanding these facets is essential to grasping the complex nature of the militia movement and its potential implications in the current socio-political landscape. The definition of "militia" carries a dual meaning, encompassing both the legally defined entities under federal and state law and the contemporary phenomenon of private paramilitary organizations. The militia movement possesses a long and dynamic history within the United States, experiencing periods of growth and decline shaped by specific historical events and the prevailing socio-political climate. In 2025, US militias are predominantly characterized by right-wing ideologies, a deep-seated distrust of government, and a focus on paramilitary activities. A diverse array of militia organizations exists, ranging from national networks with broad reach to localized groups addressing specific regional concerns, each with their own distinct beliefs and operational styles. The geographical distribution of these groups is uneven across the country, with certain states and regions exhibiting higher concentrations of activity. Activity levels within the movement have fluctuated in recent years, with a notable decline following the January 6th insurrection, yet the potential for resurgence remains a significant concern given the current climate of political polarization and potential trigger events. Political polarization exerts a substantial influence on the militia movement, contributing to heightened distrust and animosity towards opposing political groups and the government itself. Various ideologies, including Christian Identity, the Sovereign Citizen Movement, the John Birch Society, the Tea Party Movement, and Trumpism, have varying degrees of influence on the beliefs and motivations of militia members. A fundamental distinction exists between legally recognized militias, such as the National Guard and the unorganized militia, and private paramilitary groups, with the latter largely operating outside the bounds of the law. The future outlook for US militias in 2025 suggests continued adaptation and a potential for increased activity depending on the evolution of the socio-political environment.

II. Defining US Militias: Legal Framework and Contemporary Interpretations

The term "militia" in the United States carries a specific legal definition alongside its more common contemporary usage to describe private paramilitary organizations. Under federal and state law, a militia is defined as the body of able-bodied citizens between certain ages, typically ranging from 17 to 45, who may be called into service by the federal government or a state government during times of emergency [1, 2]. This definition is codified in 10 U.S. Code §246, which specifies the age parameters and the conditions under which this population can be mobilized [1]. The militia of the United States is further categorized into two classes: the organized militia and the unorganized militia [3, 4]. The organized militia consists of the National Guard and the Naval Militia, representing the formal, state-sanctioned military component of the broader militia [3]. In contrast, the unorganized militia encompasses all other members of the federal militia or a state militia who are not members of the National Guard or the Naval Militia [3, 4]. Certain individuals are exempt from militia duty, including the Vice President, judicial and executive officers of the United States and various territories, members of the armed forces not on active duty, customhouse clerks, postal workers, employees of armories and naval shipyards, pilots on navigable waters, and mariners in the sea service of a citizen or merchant of the United States [3]. This legal framework highlights the specific and limited nature of officially recognized militia service.

In contemporary usage, particularly within law enforcement and security analysis, the term "militia movement" refers to a number of private organizations that include paramilitary or similar elements [2, 5]. These groups often identify themselves as militia, unorganized militia, or constitutional militia [5]. The movement is predominantly associated with the American right-wing, and most modern organizations identifying as militias are considered illegal private paramilitary organizations that would require official sanctioning from a state government to be constitutional [5]. Members of these groups characteristically accept highly conspiratorial interpretations of politics and view themselves as defenders of traditional freedoms against perceived government oppression [2]. These private militias often conceive of the American public as an "unorganized militia" that would supplement both the national armed forces and the National Guard of each state [2]. As these private militias train and arm themselves, they increasingly adopt overtly anti-government policies [2]. This contemporary interpretation, while using the term "militia," describes entities distinct from the legally defined militias, often operating outside legal boundaries with a focus on resisting perceived government tyranny.

III. Historical Evolution of Militia Movements in the United States

The concept of a militia in the United States has deep historical roots, evolving significantly from its early colonial origins to the present day. In the early colonial era, the militia was essentially the community under arms, with most able-bodied free men obligated to serve [6, 7, 8]. These early militias served as both military units and a form of local police, crucial for defense and maintaining public safety [6, 7, 8]. They were often involved in conflicts with Native American tribes and played a role in policing enslaved populations [6]. During the American Revolution, militias played a vital role alongside the Continental Army, contributing significantly to key battles [9, 10]. This period is often romanticized by modern militia movements as an example of citizen resistance against perceived tyranny [9, 10].

In the 19th century, mandatory militia duty became increasingly unpopular, leading states to abolish it [9]. This era saw the rise of organized militias, which eventually evolved into the National Guard, while the "unorganized" militia became largely a nominal concept [9]. The late 20th century witnessed a revival of the militia movement, fueled by growing fears of big government and perceived infringements on individual liberties [9]. The modern militia movement, as it is recognized today, largely emerged in the 1990s [2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. Key catalysts for this rise were the FBI's 1992 shootout with Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and the 1993 Waco siege involving David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas [2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. These events were perceived by many as examples of government overreach and fueled significant anti-government sentiment [2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. The movement inherited paramilitary traditions from earlier groups, notably the conspiratorial and anti-government Posse Comitatus [2, 5, 12, 13, 14]. By the mid-1990s, militia groups were active in all 50 US states, with membership estimated between 20,000 and 60,000 [2, 5, 14]. The Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, carried out by Timothy McVeigh who had associations with the Michigan Militia, brought intense negative attention to the movement and increased public scrutiny [2, 5, 11, 14, 15]. Following this period, the movement experienced a decline in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to increased law enforcement pressure and public revulsion [2, 5, 11, 14, 16, 17].

The late 2000s and 2010s saw a resurgence of militia activity [2, 5, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19]. Triggers for this resurgence included the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the economic recession, and the rise of social media platforms [2, 5, 11, 16, 17]. Key groups like the Oath Keepers (founded in 2009), the Three Percenters (2008), and the Constitutional Sheriffs (c. 2010) emerged during this period, providing national-level organization [2, 17]. Notably, after the election of Donald Trump in 2016, some segments of the militia movement shifted their focus away from opposing the federal government and towards perceived enemies of Trump [2, 5, 14]. The 2020s have been marked by increased militia involvement in rallies against COVID-19 restrictions, gun control measures, and Black Lives Matter protests [2, 5, 11, 14]. The January 6th insurrection in 2021 saw significant participation from militia groups, leading to legal repercussions and a temporary decline in their numbers [11, 12, 20, 21, 22]. In response to increased scrutiny, the movement has shown signs of adapting, with a shift towards more local and regional structures and a decrease in activity on central online forums, with members dispersing to alternative platforms [11, 20].

Table: Key Events in US Militia History

Year(s)	Event	Significance/Impact on Militia Movement
1607-1754	Early Colonial Era	Militia as community defense, integral to governance.
1775-1783	American Revolution	Militias crucial alongside Continental Army, model for citizen resistance.
19th Century	Decline of Mandatory Militia Duty	Rise of National Guard, "unorganized" militia becomes nominal.
1992	Ruby Ridge Standoff	Perceived government overreach, catalyst for modern militia movement.
1993	Waco Siege	Perceived government overreach, catalyst for modern militia movement.
1995	Oklahoma City Bombing	Negative attention, increased scrutiny, initial decline.
Late 1990s - Early 2000s	Increased Law Enforcement Pressure	Further decline in militia activity.
2008	Election of Barack Obama	Resurgence of militia movement.
2008-2010	Formation of Key Groups	Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, Constitutional

		Sheriffs founded.
2014-2016	Bundy Standoff & Malheur Occupation	High-profile standoffs involving militia groups.
2016-2020	Trump Presidency	Shift in focus for some groups, increased polarization.
2020	Rallies & Protests	Increased activity related to COVID, BLM, gun control.
2021	January 6th Insurrection	Significant militia involvement, legal repercussions, temporary decline.
2021-2025	Post-Insurrection Adaptation	Shift to local/regional structures, online dispersal.

IV. Characteristics and Ideologies Driving US Militias in 2025

US militias in 2025 are primarily characterized by a deep-seated anti-government sentiment, fueled by a belief that both federal and often state governments are overreaching and potentially tyrannical [2, 5, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24]. This distrust forms a foundational element uniting various militia groups. A paramilitary orientation is another key characteristic, with an emphasis on military-style training, the use of weaponry, and tactical gear [2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 22, 23, 25]. This reflects their belief in the necessity of armed resistance and self-defense against perceived threats.

The acceptance of highly conspiratorial interpretations of politics is widespread within the movement, often revolving around notions of a "New World Order" or similar globalist plots aimed at eroding American freedoms [2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 23, 26]. These theories provide a framework for their anti-government views and foster a sense of imminent threat. Militia members often see themselves as defenders of "traditional freedoms," particularly the Second Amendment right to bear arms, which they view as essential for resisting tyranny [2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 23, 24, 27]. The movement is predominantly aligned with right-wing political ideologies, incorporating elements of libertarianism, constitutionalism, and sometimes more extreme viewpoints [2, 5, 13, 14, 24, 27]. Recruitment often draws from specific demographics, including veterans, libertarians, and Second Amendment advocates [5, 17, 20]. Some within the movement subscribe to the "insurrection theory," which posits a right to rebel against a government perceived as tyrannical [5]. Operationally, these groups often engage in training scenarios, claim identifiable territories, espouse anti-government rhetoric, develop contingency plans, and some even consider extreme measures to protect their interpretation of the Constitution [5]. The use of specific symbols and branding, such as Revolutionary War imagery, tactical gear, and in-group identifiers like the Punisher skull or the Roman numeral III, contributes to group identity and communication [11].

V. Types of Militia Organizations Active in 2025

Militia organizations active in 2025 can be broadly categorized into legal classifications and contemporary movement classifications. Legally, the US militia consists of the organized militia, comprising the National Guard and Naval Militia, which are governmental military components at both the state and federal levels [2, 3, 4]. The unorganized militia includes all other able-bodied citizens within the legally defined age range who can be called upon in emergencies but do not constitute active military units in peacetime [2, 3, 4].

Within the contemporary "militia movement," the primary focus is on private paramilitary groups that operate outside of government control and are largely considered illegal without official state sanction [2, 5, 11]. These groups vary in their scope and organization. National groups with a presence across multiple states include the Oath Keepers, known for their Patriot movement and Trumpism-aligned beliefs; the Three Percenters, who adhere to right-libertarianism and constitutionalism; the Constitutional Sheriffs, who believe in the ultimate authority of county sheriffs; the Not Fucking Around Coalition (NFAC); Guardians of Liberty; the Proud Boys; the Boogaloo movement, associated with anti-government and anti-law enforcement sentiments; and the American Patriots Three Percent [5, 17, 18]. Statewide groups operate within specific states, addressing regional concerns. Examples include Arizona Border Recon, Michigan Militia, Texas State Militia, and numerous others listed across various states [5, 18]. Local groups are even more geographically focused, often operating within specific counties or cities, such as the Alabama Constitutional Militia in Clanton or the California State Militia in the Bay Area [18]. Furthermore, the constitutionalist wing of the militia movement can be classified by their organizational structure, including Open Constitutionalist groups, Constitutionalist groups with a command structure, those with a cell structure, and underground groups with no public contact [5]. This diverse landscape of militia organizations reflects a range of motivations, beliefs, and levels of organization within the broader movement.

Table: Key National Militia Organizations (as of 2025)

Group Name	Year Founded (if known)	General Ideology/Beliefs	Estimated Level of Activity
Oath Keepers	2009	Patriot movement, Trumpism, anti-government	Medium
Three Percenters	2008	Right-libertarianism, Patriot movement, Second Amendment, Constitutionalism, anti-government	Medium
Constitutional Sheriffs	c. 2010	Belief in ultimate authority of county sheriffs, anti-federal government	Low to Medium
Not Fucking Around Coalition (NFAC)	2020	Black nationalist, anti-racist, Second Amendment advocacy	Low
Proud Boys	2016	Far-right, anti-immigrant, anti-leftist, known for violence	Medium
Boogaloo movement	Late 2010s	Anti-government, anti-law enforcement, right-libertarian	Medium
American Patriots Three Percent	Unknown (active as of 2024)	Patriot movement, Second Amendment, Constitutionalism, anti-government	Low

Note: Estimated levels of activity are based on recent reports and may vary.

VI. Geographical Distribution and Activity Levels of US Militias in 2025

Historically, militia groups have demonstrated a presence across most states in the US [5, 13, 14]. While this indicates a broad national reach, the distribution of these groups is not uniform, with certain regions and states potentially exhibiting higher concentrations of activity based on local socio-political factors. For instance, an analysis conducted in 2020 identified Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Oregon as states at higher risk for increased militia activity, particularly around election periods [28]. This suggests a correlation between politically charged environments and militia mobilization. Data from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in 2023 identified 52 active militia groups throughout the United States [20, 29]. This figure represents a notable decline from previous years, which could be attributed to the legal and social fallout from the January 6th insurrection. Despite this overall decrease, numerous state-specific and local groups remain active, as evidenced by lists compiled as recently as 2024 [18]. This indicates that while national-level organization may have been impacted, activity persists at more localized levels. For example, in 2023, the SPLC noted an "alliance" among militias in Tennessee, West Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and even included groups from Vermont and Arizona, showcasing regional networking [20].

Activity levels within the US militia movement have seen a decline since the January 6th insurrection. The arrests and prosecutions of numerous individuals involved in the attack, particularly those associated with national militia organizations, have likely contributed to this decrease [11, 20, 24]. Many militias have reportedly reverted to a more localized or regional structure, a strategic decision potentially aimed at avoiding the increased scrutiny that national organizations faced [20]. Communication and training continue within these groups, often facilitated through online platforms and traditional radio, with occasional in-person training exercises [20]. Despite the recent decline, concerns remain about the potential for a resurgence in activity. Assessments from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2025 indicate a continued high threat landscape for domestic terrorism, including the possibility of violent extremist responses to domestic socio-political developments, especially concerning the 2024 election cycle [28, 30, 31, 32]. Historically, militia groups have been involved in protests and rallies focused on issues such as COVID-19 restrictions, gun control measures, Black Lives Matter, and election results [2, 5, 11, 14, 24]. The outcome of the 2024 election is specifically feared as a potential trigger that could re-energize the movement [24].

VII. Key Trends and Projections for the US Militia Movement (2023-2025)

Data from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) indicates a downward trend in the number of active militia groups, with 52 identified in 2023, a decrease from 61 in 2022 and 92 in 2021 [20, 29]. This decline is largely attributed to the ongoing fallout from the January 6th insurrection, which resulted in numerous arrests and convictions of militia members [20]. A notable trend within the movement is a return to more localized and regional organizational structures [20]. This shift away from large national organizations like the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters appears to be a strategic adaptation to mitigate the legal and law enforcement pressures experienced after January 6th [20].

Despite the decrease in the number of organized militia groups, the potential for extremist violence remains a concern. Data from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) suggests a possible increase in extremist-related murders in 2025, following a three-year decline [33, 34]. While not exclusively tied to militias, this trend reflects a broader risk associated with extremist ideologies. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has assessed that the terrorism threat landscape will remain high in 2025, including potential violent extremist responses to domestic socio-political developments, particularly surrounding the 2024 election cycle [30, 31, 32]. Deepening political polarization is also expected to contribute to continued political violence in 2025, creating an environment in which extremist ideologies can thrive [30, 35]. The 2024 and subsequent election cycles are anticipated to be significant periods for potential militia activity, with concerns about violence targeting voters, candidates, and election workers [24, 28, 31]. Online, the militia movement is adapting by dispersing from central forums to a wider array of alternative platforms, making their communication and organization more fragmented and challenging to monitor [11]. There is a prevailing concern that the outcome of the 2024 election could re-energize the militia movement, regardless of the winner [24]. Furthermore, vigilante activity, which aligns with some militia ideologies, is reportedly becoming a more common form of political violence, potentially targeting minority communities and immigrants [36]. Finally, after the decline seen post-January 6th, there is a possibility of a resurgence in mobilization by organized groups prone to violence, including militias, particularly around contentious issues like immigration [36].

VIII. The Impact of Political Polarization on the Growth and Activities of Militias

Political polarization in the United States significantly contributes to an environment conducive to the growth and activities of militia groups. Research indicates that individuals exhibiting higher levels of political polarization are more inclined to support the use of violence for political objectives [35]. This suggests that the current climate of intense partisan division can normalize and even encourage the extreme viewpoints and potential actions espoused by militias. Polarization can foster the dehumanization and demonization of political opponents, making violence against them seem more acceptable [35, 37]. When individuals view those in opposing political parties as a fundamental threat to the nation's well-being, the psychological barriers to aggression and even violence can be lowered. This process of moral disengagement, where opponents are perceived as less than human or inherently evil, can be exploited by extremist groups like militias.

Furthermore, political polarization cultivates a sense of moral superiority and certainty among partisans [35]. Militia members, often deeply convinced of their own righteousness and the correctness of their interpretation of the Constitution, may feel morally justified in their opposition to the government and in taking what they deem necessary actions to defend their perceived values. This conviction can fuel their commitment to the movement and their willingness to engage in paramilitary activities. Political elites also play a role in this dynamic. By using and exacerbating social and political divisions, they can energize their base against perceived out-groups [35]. This form of mobilization, while not always explicitly calling for violence, can create a climate in which extremist groups find it easier to recruit and operate. The rhetoric employed by polarized political figures can inadvertently or intentionally resonate with the anti-government sentiments prevalent in militia circles.

Partisan bias also influences how security threats are perceived [37]. Voters and politicians may view threats through a partisan lens, potentially leading to skewed interpretations of the actions and motivations of militia groups depending on their own political affiliations. This can complicate efforts to objectively assess and effectively respond to the challenges posed by these groups. The increasing distrust and dislike of opposing political parties, a phenomenon known as affective polarization, further exacerbates this issue [37]. This deep-seated animosity can be readily channeled into a broader distrust of government and societal institutions, aligning with the core tenets of many militia ideologies. Some analysts have even noted that political polarization has become a form of "entertainment" for some, potentially normalizing extreme views and behaviors by constantly highlighting and sensationalizing divisions [38]. Finally, the use of fear-based rhetoric in electoral campaigns can heighten anxieties and contribute to an atmosphere of crisis, which can be exploited by militia groups seeking to recruit and mobilize individuals who feel threatened or disenfranchised [39].

IX. The Influence of Ideologies: Christian Identity, Sovereign Citizen Movement, John Birch Society, Tea Party Movement, and Trumpism

Several distinct ideologies exert influence on the US militia movement, shaping the beliefs and motivations of its members. Christian Identity is a religious ideology rooted in white supremacist and antisemitic beliefs, positing that white people of European descent are the true descendants of the biblical Israelites, while other groups, including Jewish people and people of color, are considered inferior or even evil [2, 5, 12, 17, 40, 41, 42, 43]. This ideology often incorporates strong anti-government sentiments and the belief in a coming race war, providing a theological justification for extremist actions [2, 5, 12, 17, 40, 41, 42, 43]. Historically, Christian Identity played a significant role in the early development of the militia movement in the 1990s, particularly through the Posse Comitatus movement [2, 5, 12, 41]. While its direct influence might have waned somewhat, its core tenets continue to resonate within certain segments of the militia movement, particularly among those holding white supremacist views.

The Sovereign Citizen Movement is a loosely defined ideology whose adherents believe that they are subject only to common law and are exempt from most statutes enacted by federal and state governments [2, 5, 12, 13, 17, 23, 26, 44, 45]. They often engage in pseudo-legalistic tactics to challenge government authority, such as filing frivolous lawsuits, refusing to pay taxes, and creating their own forms of identification [2, 5, 12, 13, 17, 23, 26, 44, 45]. Their distrust of government and legal systems aligns with the anti-government sentiments prevalent in the militia movement, and some sovereign citizens have been known to participate in or form militia groups [2, 5, 12, 13, 17, 23, 26, 44, 45].

The John Birch Society, founded in 1958, is a right-wing organization known for its anti-communist, anti-government, and conspiracy-oriented views [46, 47, 48]. While not exclusively a militia movement, its long history of promoting distrust of government and advocating for individual liberty and limited government has influenced some individuals and groups within the broader Patriot movement, which overlaps with the militia movement [46, 47, 48]. The Tea Party Movement, which gained prominence in 2009, was a conservative and libertarian political movement focused on reducing government spending, lowering taxes, and adhering to a strict interpretation of the Constitution [49, 50, 51]. While primarily a political movement, its emphasis on anti-government sentiment, constitutionalism, and individual liberties resonated with many individuals who were also drawn to the militia movement [49, 50, 51]. The Tea Party provided a platform for these ideas and likely contributed to the resurgence of militia activity during its peak.

"Trumpism," while not a formal ideology, refers to the political movement and style associated with the 45th President of the United States. This includes a populist, nationalist, and often confrontational approach to politics, characterized by strong support for conservative principles, skepticism towards established institutions (including the media and government bureaucracy), and a focus on issues like immigration and national sovereignty [24, 52, 53, 54, 55]. The individual's rhetoric, particularly concerning election integrity and perceived threats to traditional American values, has resonated strongly with many in the militia movement [24, 53, 54, 55, 56].

This connection was evident in the participation of militia groups in rallies and protests supporting him, culminating in the January 6th insurrection [24, 56, 57]. The movement provided a unifying figure and a set of grievances that galvanized various right-wing extremist groups, including militias. The enduring influence of this political figure on the Republican party and the broader conservative movement means that "Trumpism" will likely continue to shape the landscape of the militia movement in 2025 and beyond.

Table: Ideological Influences on US Militias (2025)

Ideology	Core Beliefs Relevant to Militias	Examples of Influence
Christian Identity	White people as true Israelites, antisemitism, anti-government, belief in race war	Historical influence on early militia movement, continued presence in some groups
Sovereign Citizen Movement	Belief in exemption from most government laws, adherence to common law, distrust of government	Overlap in anti-government sentiment, pseudo-legal tactics sometimes adopted by militia members
John Birch Society	Anti-communism, anti-government, conspiracy theories, emphasis on individual liberty	Historical influence on the broader Patriot movement, some overlap in ideology
Tea Party Movement	Limited government, lower taxes, strict constitutionalism, anti-government sentiment	Resurgence of militia movement during Tea Party era, shared ideological themes
"Trumpism"	Populism, nationalism, distrust of institutions, focus on immigration and election integrity	Strong resonance with many militia members, significant role in galvanizing groups, evident in January 6th events

X. Legal vs. Illegal Militias: Distinguishing Legitimate and Private Paramilitary Groups

A critical distinction must be made between legally recognized militias and private paramilitary groups operating under the guise of militias. The US Constitution (Article I, Section 8, Clause 15 and the Second Amendment) acknowledges the importance of a well-regulated militia [58, 59]. Federal law, specifically 10 U.S. Code §246, defines the militia as all able-bodied citizens between the ages of 17 and 45 (with some exceptions) [1, 3]. This legal framework further divides the militia into two categories: the organized militia and the unorganized militia [3, 4].

The organized militia consists of the National Guard and the Naval Militia [3]. These are state-level military forces, often under the command of the state governor, that can also be called into federal service [60, 61]. They are subject to military law and operate within a clear legal framework. The unorganized militia, on the other hand, comprises all other citizens meeting the age criteria who are not part of the organized militia [3, 4]. While these individuals are technically part of the militia, they are not actively organized or trained as a unit unless called upon by the government in specific circumstances, such as a national emergency [3, 4].

In contrast to these legally defined entities, the contemporary "militia movement" largely consists of private paramilitary groups [2, 5]. These groups are not sanctioned or controlled by any government authority and operate outside the legal framework governing official militias [2, 5, 11]. While members often claim to be part of the "unorganized militia" exercising their constitutional rights, their activities, particularly when involving paramilitary training and the assertion of law enforcement powers, often fall outside legal boundaries [2, 5, 11, 62, 63]. According to legal scholars and interpretations of state laws, private military groups are generally illegal unless explicitly authorized by state law [5]. Activities such as unauthorized paramilitary training, especially with firearms and explosives, can violate state laws prohibiting the formation of private armies [63]. Some states have specific statutes addressing and prohibiting private military organizations [63].

It is crucial to differentiate between the constitutional concept of a well-regulated militia, which implies government oversight and control, and the modern phenomenon of private, often ideologically driven paramilitary groups that operate independently and sometimes in opposition to the government [5, 62, 63]. The former is a legitimate component of national and state defense, while the latter, lacking official sanction and often adhering to extremist ideologies, poses potential threats to public safety and the rule of law [5, 62, 63]. Law enforcement agencies and legal experts generally consider these private militia groups to be illegal when they engage in activities reserved for the state military or law enforcement without proper authorization [5, 62, 63].

Table: Key Differences Between Legal and Private Militias

Feature	Legal Militia (National Guard/Unorganized Militia)	Private Paramilitary Groups (Contemporary "Militia Movement")
Legal Basis	Defined by federal and state law (10 U.S. Code §246) and state constitutions	Operate outside of explicit legal sanction; generally considered illegal unless authorized by state law
Organization & Control	Organized militia (National Guard/Naval Militia) has formal command structure and government oversight. Unorganized militia is generally not organized in peacetime.	Self-organized with independent leadership; no government control or oversight
Purpose	National and state defense, emergency response, law enforcement support under government authority	Often focused on resisting perceived government tyranny, protecting individual liberties as they interpret them, and sometimes promoting extremist ideologies
Training & Armament	National Guard adheres to military standards and regulations. Unorganized militia members are typically civilians with their own firearms.	Often engage in paramilitary training with privately owned weapons; some groups may possess illegal weapons
Legal Status of Activities	Activities are generally legal when operating under government orders and within legal parameters	Paramilitary training, especially with firearms and explosives, and asserting law enforcement powers are often illegal without state authorization
Constitutional Interpretation	View "well-regulated militia" as under government authority	Often interpret "militia" as the right of private citizens to form independent armed groups to check government power

XI. Future Outlook for US Militias in 2025 and Beyond

The future of US militias in 2025 appears to be shaped by several converging factors, including political polarization, the aftermath of the 2024 elections, and the ongoing adaptation of the movement itself. Current trends suggest that while the number of formally organized militia groups might remain lower than pre-January 6th levels, the underlying ideologies and the potential for politically motivated violence persist [20, 24, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35]. The shift towards more localized and regional structures observed in recent years is likely to continue in 2025, as these smaller groups may be harder for law enforcement to track and infiltrate compared to large national organizations [20]. This decentralization could also lead to a greater diversity in the specific grievances and focuses of individual groups, making the movement as a whole more complex and less predictable.

The outcome of the 2024 elections is widely anticipated to be a significant catalyst for militia activity [24, 28, 30, 31]. Regardless of which party wins the presidency or control of Congress, it is expected that some segments of the population will feel aggrieved or threatened, potentially leading to increased mobilization among militia groups who believe their political or ideological goals are under attack [24, 28, 30, 31]. Concerns are particularly high regarding the possibility of violence targeting election infrastructure, voters, or political opponents [24, 28, 31]. The Department of Homeland Security's assessment of a continued high threat landscape for domestic terrorism in 2025 underscores these concerns [30, 31, 32].

The online presence of militias will likely continue to evolve. The crackdown on major social media platforms following the January 6th events has already led to a dispersal of militia members to alternative and often more obscure online spaces [11]. This trend is expected to continue, making it more challenging for researchers and law enforcement to monitor their activities and communications [11]. The use of encrypted messaging apps and platforms popular among specific ideological groups will likely remain prevalent.

The influence of ideologies like "Trumpism" is expected to endure, continuing to shape the narratives and grievances that resonate within the militia movement [24, 52, 53, 54, 55]. The strong anti-establishment sentiment and focus on issues like election integrity and perceived cultural threats will likely remain key drivers for recruitment and mobilization [24, 53, 54, 55, 56]. It is also possible that new issues or events could emerge in 2025 that further energize or fragment the militia movement. Economic instability, social unrest related to issues of racial justice or other societal concerns, or specific government actions could all serve as potential triggers for increased activity.

Finally, the distinction between legal and illegal militias will remain critical. Law enforcement and policymakers will need to continue to differentiate between constitutionally protected rights to assemble and bear arms, and the illegal paramilitary activities of private groups that pose a threat to public safety and democratic institutions [5, 62, 63]. Efforts to counter the potential for violence and extremism associated with these groups will likely involve a combination of law enforcement action, intelligence gathering, and addressing the underlying socio-political factors that contribute to their growth.

XII. Conclusion

US militias in 2025 represent a complex and evolving phenomenon with deep historical roots and significant implications for domestic security. Defined by both legal statutes and contemporary interpretations as private paramilitary groups, these entities are largely driven by right-wing ideologies, a profound distrust of government, and a commitment to armed self-defense against perceived tyranny. The historical trajectory of the militia movement reveals periods of growth spurred by specific socio-political events, with the 1990s and the period following the 2008 election marking notable resurgences. While the January 6th insurrection led to a temporary decline and a shift towards more localized structures, the potential for renewed activity remains high, particularly in the context of intense political polarization and the aftermath of the 2024 elections.

A diverse range of militia organizations, from national networks to local cells, operate across the country, though their geographical distribution is uneven. Their activities, while currently somewhat subdued compared to earlier peaks, continue through online communication, training exercises, and occasional participation in protests and rallies. Key trends for the near future include the continued decentralization of the movement, adaptation in online communication strategies, and the significant influence of political polarization and ideologies such as "Trumpism."

The crucial distinction between legally recognized militias (the National Guard and the unorganized militia under government control) and private paramilitary groups (operating outside legal sanction) is paramount. The latter often engage in activities that blur the lines between constitutional rights and illegal paramilitary behavior, posing challenges for law enforcement and raising concerns about public safety.

Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, the US militia movement will likely remain a significant feature of the domestic security landscape. Its trajectory will be heavily influenced by the evolving socio-political environment, the outcomes of elections, and the ongoing efforts of law enforcement and policymakers to address the challenges it presents. Understanding the historical context, characteristics, ideologies, and legal distinctions surrounding these groups is essential for effectively analyzing and responding to their potential impact on American society.

XIII. References

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